

Executive Summary
for Corporate Parenting Board
Interim Adoption Service Report – 1 April to 30 September 2019

Introduction

Adoption@Heart is a Regional Adoption Agency providing adoption services on behalf of Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton Councils. The service is hosted by Wolverhampton and went live on 1 April 2019. Following a directive from the Department for Education in 2015 all local authorities in England are required to enter into regional arrangements by 2020.

This report fulfils the obligations in Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) Adoption and Children Act 2002 to report to the “executive side” of the local authority. This has guided the structure and information set out in the report below.

It is important to note that data and information within this report is accurate as of 30 September 2019

Section two and three of the report is specific to adoption performance relating to children in Wolverhampton Council. Sections four onwards relate to service performance for the partnership as a whole.

Key Areas of Performance to highlight

Children

The number of children waiting on a Placement Order and not matched or placed at 30 September 2019 is twenty-four. Of these only eight are the subject of active family finding as the others were in the process of being placed for adoption at the end of the six-month period.

The number of Placement Orders Granted has reduced with ten granted during the six months against one-year performance of fifty-two, forty and fifty-five over the previous three years.

The Number of SHOBPA Decisions has also reduced with fourteen given in the six months compared with fifty-three, forty-five and fifty-nine over the previous three years.

The number of children placed for adoption in the six months at 9 is lower than previous years, with forty-two, forty-five and forty-five over the previous three years.

The three-year Adoption Scorecard average figures are above thresholds as well as the national averages and the six months performance for the thirty-five children adopted is also above the thresholds. The context regarding the characteristics of the children adopted is contained in the report.

Early Permanence Placements are significantly lower than previous years with a need to develop and embed this practice moving forward.

Adopter Recruitment

The Adoption@Heart service one-year performance for adopter recruitment has been significantly affected by the low numbers of legacy adopters in the system who transferred across when the service went live. The targets were considerably higher than the combined performance of the four local authorities and the transition challenges in year one have further impacted on performance. The service is likely to approve between fifty and sixty adopters in year one against a target of one hundred and twenty.

The range of activities planned to address this challenge within the marketing strategy are outlined in the report.

The Department for Education has provided additional funding to assist adoption services nationally with recruitment due to the continued low numbers of adopters in the system.

Family finding

The family finding service has been operating on lower staffing capacity during the first six months due to the fact that the numbers of children in the system waiting for adoptive placements are higher than was expected before the service went live. Additional capacity has been agreed for twelve months and further assessment of demand is needed to reach a clear understanding of the resource needs of the service.

Forty-seven children were placed for adoption in the six-month period, against a projection of one hundred and forty nine from data provided before 1 April.

Numbers of children requiring adoptive placements in Sandwell are higher than expected whilst the number within Dudley is lower. The higher demand regarding children waiting, along with delay for some of these children in Sandwell has had an impact on the other partners.

Adoption Support

The Adoption Support service has established itself across region in the first 6 months. Demand has been high and further data analysis is needed in understanding the resource needs of this service area. Managers and staff have been determined and resourceful in ensuring the families in the greatest need are being prioritised for support. Ninety Adoption Support Fund applications have been made in the first six months.

Further development work is needed in reaching the point where a clear accessible adoption support offer is available across the region in line with innovative approaches that are being adopted by other regional services.

Service Development

The service has been challenged by ICT related issues restricting access to children and adopter information. These are now in the process of being resolved.

Staffing retention is positive with low vacancy rates following the TUPE exercise in April.

The adoption panel service has been operational since April and clear processes have been developed for ADM decisions.

Considerable practice development work is needed to reach a point where clear practice guidance is in place for all service areas. Discussion is taking place at board level to ensure funding is available for this.

Good progress has been made in developing the culture and vision for the new service with full involvement from staff.

Further work is needed across the partnership in engaging with staff and improving understanding of the service, with a view to improving communication and joint working.

Clear governance structures are in place within a Strategic Commissioning Board and a Management Board with representation from all partners.

Summary

During the first six months of operating the Adoption@Heart service has made significant progress and there are many successes that should be acknowledged in placing children with adoptive parents. The service has also faced some significant challenges with regard to the transition phase in establishing the new agency. Performance regarding family finding and adopter recruitment at the end of September 2019 is reflective of these challenges and it is likely the impact of the transition will continue to have an impact during the remainder of year one.

Key priorities as the service moves forward and becomes more established are:

- The development of improved and established practice guidance for all areas of practice.
- Improved access to children's information and communication between the service and partners in progressing family finding for children more effectively.
- Further development of the adopter marketing and recruitment strategy with a view to increasing the "in house" pool of adopters and reducing inter-agency usage.
- Further development of the Adoption Support "offer" for the region.
- Improved engagement and partnership working within the region.

Mark Tobin, Service Head

13 January 2020